

## Health District Transition Articles

### **Skamania County will contract with new Clark County Health Department**

Skamania County has made its decision regarding public-health services and will contract with the new Clark County Health Department for two years starting in January 2003. This means the Southwest Washington Health District staff who previously provided services for Skamania County will become Clark County employees at the first of the year.

At its meeting on September 19, the Board of Health postponed a transition agreement with Clark County that would address topics such as collective bargaining, property distribution, debt responsibilities, and transfer of employees. This postponement allows Skamania County time to review the agreement.

Staff from the health district and both counties will create a 2003-2004 public health budget for Skamania, which will remain separate from the budget for the county's new health department.

In other news, the Washington State Department of Health has released its report on health-district programs. The report states that the agency performs well but suffers the same budget constraints as other local health agencies across the state. The complete report is available on the county's web page at [www.clark.wa.gov](http://www.clark.wa.gov). *Bill Barron, County Administrator, ext. 4307.*

### **Health District update**

September 12, 2002 – Key steps leading to public-health services becoming part of the county are proceeding on schedule. Important decisions yet to be made include the 2003-04 budget, particularly as they affect specific services linked to revenue reductions resulting from the loss of MVET funds. The Board of Health is expected to make these decisions at its September 19 meeting.

One of the budget issues is environmental health services fees, which include fees that deal with inspecting septic systems. Officials have expressed interest in having the policy for determining these fees be consistent with the county's policy for other development-related services: that customers pick up 90 percent of the costs to provide a service, with the county picking up the remaining 10 percent as the public share of these costs. A review of the health district's fee-related activities is currently being conducted by Henderson, Young & Co. Its analysis will provide information for making any potential changes in the fees that environmental health services charge.

### **Health district transition plan and new Transition Times are available on web site**

August 5, 2002 – What is the county doing to move Southwest Washington Health District services to the county on January 1, 2003? A copy of the transition plan prepared by Dave Mercier is now available on the county's Internet site. Go to <http://www.clark.wa.gov/current/health/index.htm>.

### **Framework for health district reorganization is taking shape**

July 15, 2002 – The transition teams working on the health district reorganization continue to meet regularly. Detailed decisions are still to come, but the general framework for integrating public health services into Clark County is taking shape.

We expect about 80 percent of health district services—the core health services provided to the public—to join the county as a single unit. Most of the administrative staff, the remaining 20 percent or so, will disperse among the county's administrative and support departments. For example, the health district's human resources specialist would join our HR department, dealing principally with issues pertaining to staff in the Department of Health.

Budget questions continue to be an immediate focus. Health district and county staff will bring options for identifying savings to the Board of Health this Thursday. At its following meeting on August 15, the board will finalize budget decisions that take into account operating efficiencies as well as the loss of revenues from state motor vehicle excise tax (MVET) "backfill." Budget decisions for public health services will ultimately be considered as part of the county's own budget process for the upcoming 2003-04 biennium. *Bill Barron, County Administrator, ext. 4307.*

### **Meeting focuses on health district budget**

July 1, 2002 – Staff from the Southwest Washington Health District and Clark County met with the Board of Health on Thursday, June 27, to discuss the upcoming two-year budget for public-health services. That budget will need to address:

- The loss of \$1 million annually in revenues from state motor vehicle excise tax (MVET) "backfill," beginning next July.
- The reduction of \$500,000 annually in expenditures to be realized through operating efficiencies.

Health district and county staff will bring options for identifying these savings to the Board of Health at its July meeting. Staff believes that the operating efficiencies mentioned above can be achieved without losing current positions or reducing services.

The loss of MVET revenue is a more significant issue. The Board of Health has authorized staff to look at all available options, including fee increases, program elimination, service reductions, further operating efficiencies, and new revenue sources. Clearly, the board's goal is to retain and sustain public health services to the greatest extent possible.

Fortunately the transition to the county will not compound any of these problems. Increased costs due to the transition are offset by the efficiencies that it creates, *Glenn Olsen, Director, Clark County Office of Budget and Information Services, (360)397-6087 ext. 4840.*

### **Business analysts, project manager tapped for health district transition**

May 20, 2002 – At the request of Clark County, the Portland accounting firm of Moss Adams has begun an analysis of Southwest Washington Health District's business processes. This is an important part of the transition: the county will implement its new financial management system in the fall, and the business side of public-health services will need to mesh with the new system. Moss Adams has done similar work for the county in the past. Departments that worked with the accounting firm found it helpful to have outside professionals review procedures and offer suggestions.

The transition will receive additional support from Dave Mercier, former Battle Ground city manager, who will serve as project manager. Dave will work with both county and health district staff to develop the transition plan and to coordinate tasks and timelines. He will also be responsible for monitoring progress until the plan is fully implemented. *Bill Barron, County Administrator, (360)397-2232 ext. 4307.*

### **Meeting held with Washington State Board of Health**

April 1, 2002 – On March 13 Commissioner Judie Stanton and County Administrator Bill Barron made a presentation to the Washington State Board of Health, discussing the recent decision to merge public health services into the county governmental organization.

This change follows other Clark County initiatives to coordinate and consolidate services so that public needs can be met more efficiently with fewer dollars. Interestingly, what Commissioner Stanton and Bill heard back from the health board is that a number of other counties are considering similar consolidations. They will be looking at Clark County as a model for how to make this type of change effectively.

No specific decisions have been made yet about how to integrate public health services. At this point a transition team of county and health district staff are meeting to share information about public health programs in order to develop plans for future operations. *Francine Reis, Director, Human Resources, (360)397-2456 ext. 4065.*

### **Teams meet to discuss Southwest Washington Health District transition**

March 11, 2002 – Last month the Board of Clark County Commissioners announced their intention to fold the Southwest Washington Health District into the county organization. An important reason for this decision was the need to continue to provide excellent public health services to the community in the face of diminishing state funds. By incorporating health district programs into the county, there is the potential to streamline operations and decrease overhead, which could potentially mean more cost-effective service delivery.

The target date for the transition to be completed is January 1, 2003. That said, we do not yet know how the reorganization will finally look. Clark County and the health district each have teams of key staff working to ensure a seamless transition, with a goal of minimal disruption of public health services as changes get under way. The transition teams have already started to meet and are conducting an initial review of the issues and critical success factors. *Francine Reis, Director, Human Resources, (360)397-2456 ext. 4065.*

### **Clark County, Health Board agree to reorganize health services**

February 19, 2002 – Planning will begin immediately for Clark County to provide services currently offered by the Southwest Washington Health District, which serves Clark and Skamania counties.

The Board of Health, which oversees the Health District, and the Board of Clark County Commissioners agreed February 11 that strategic planning for the health district will focus on a more economical approach to service delivery in Clark County. *Francine Reis, Director, Human Resources, (360)397-2456 ext. 4065.*